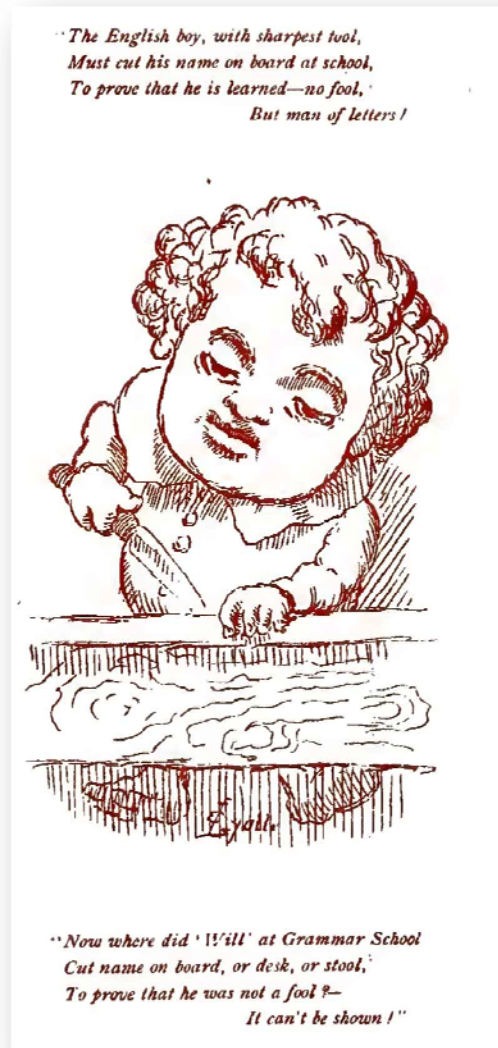


# Shakespeare's Education



In the Elizabethan era, for a child to attend grammar school, certain preliminary qualifications had to be abided by and they were: (1) the child needed to be a residence of the town where the school was; (2) the child had to be the age of seven and (3) the child had to be able to read and write in English and in Latin. These qualifications were clearly set in the Statutes of law with

the general purpose (or aim) to “better regulate and order” the affairs of various schools in England. Parmentier, in his *Histoire de l’Education en Angleterre* (1896),<sup>1</sup> writes how the foundation of grammar schools in England were around 150; de Montmorency gives the number as 148 schools founded and 34 additionally capable of offering an education,<sup>2</sup> while Adams places the number at 137, the number given in the Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission.<sup>3</sup> Sir Sidney Lee (author) emphatically asserts that the number of schools at this time was less than 200. That he underestimated the number is conclusive enough, since 281 schools concerning, which research dates back to Elizabeth’s Reign, 51 schools concerning which data are lacking for the exact years under study but are given for those closely preceding or following, 9 schools whose existence between 1558–1603 is more doubtful, and 2 schools founded in the Reign of Elizabeth but actually begun later. These figures indicate that by the close of the Reign of Elizabeth the number of schools at the time of the Reformation had been equaled if not surpassed; in the rapid growth of the grammar schools of this period is to be seen the expression of the interest in secondary education.

While the academic entrance requirements of the grammar schools varied, they generally included the ability of the child enrolling to be able to read and write, as stated previously. Furthermore, there are not few cases that demonstrate how the child’s ability to read meant the ability to read Latin as well as English.<sup>4</sup> In a few instances the requirements are more specific. As an example, in St. Albans the candidate had to pass an examination given by the master to determine how well he had mastered his *Accidence without booke*.<sup>5</sup> In Shrewsbury the following Statute deals with entrance requirements: “The candidate must be able to write his own name with his own hand; read English perfectly; have his accidence without book, and give any case of any number of a noun substantive or adjective, any person of any number of a verb active or passive, and make a Latin by any of the concords, the Latin words being first

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<sup>1</sup> Perrin & Cie., Paris.

<sup>2</sup> de Montmorency’s *The Progress of Education in England* (p. 4).

<sup>3</sup> Adams’ *History of the Elementary School Contest in England* (p. 18).

<sup>4</sup> A. Monroe Stowe, *English Grammar Schools in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1908).

<sup>5</sup> *Statutes* (1570), Carlisle (Vol. I, pp. 516, 517).

given him.”<sup>6</sup> The hours in school were lengthy, from daylight till dark in winter, and from six to six in summer, with suitable meal intervals and play hours.

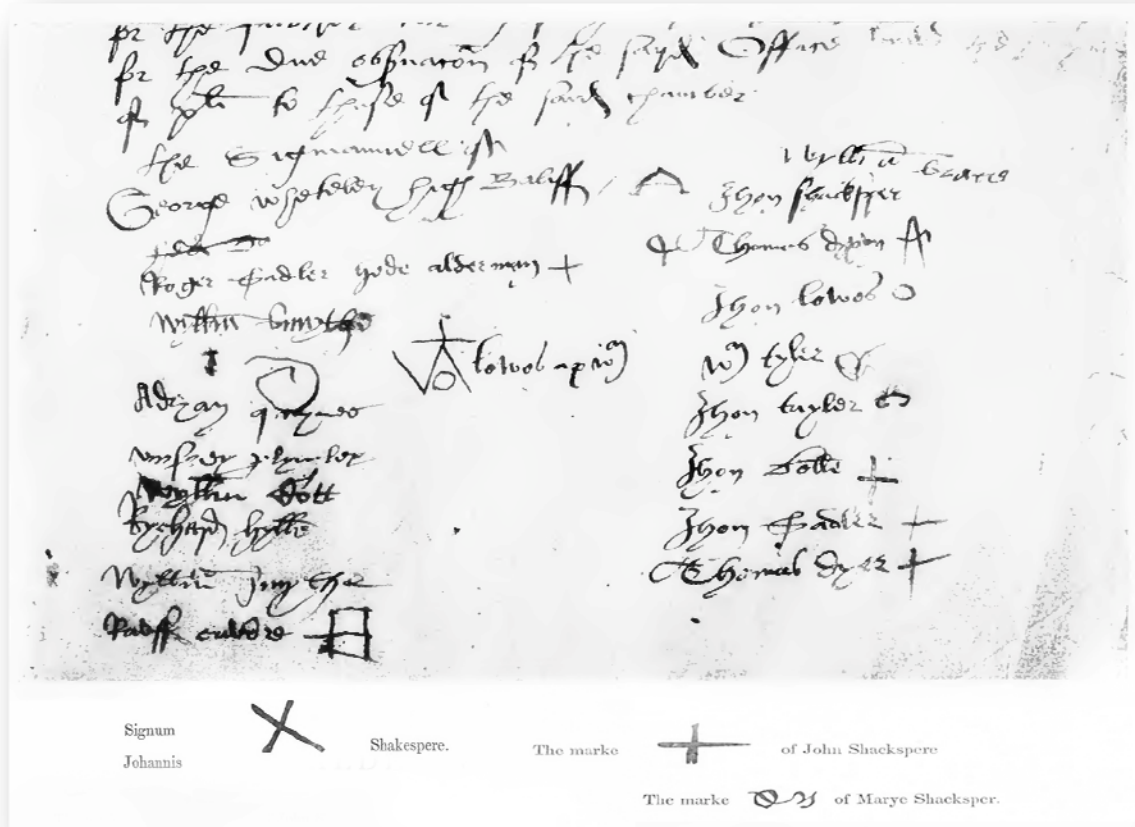


Figure 1: Samples of John Shakespeare's mark

The curriculum of the day in schools, can be found in the Founder's Statute of a grammar school (Sir John Dean's) in 1553, where the books used are enumerated with the *Accidence* and *Grammar* set out by King Henry VIII; the *Institutum Christiani* and *Copia* that Erasmus wrote; *Colloquium Erasmi*, *Ovidi Metamorphosis*, Terrance, Tully, Horace, Sallus, Virgil, and others as thought suitable. The grammar school of Stratford, according to Leland, "was founded by one Jolepe, a Master of Arts, born in Stratford, where about he had some patrimony, and that he gave to this school."<sup>7</sup> Malone tells us, that both Leland and Dugdale are "mistaken in the name of the founder, who was Thomas Jolyffe, as appears by a rent-roll of the

<sup>6</sup> Statutes, 1577. Staunton, The Great Public Schools of England (p. 420).

<sup>7</sup> Itinerary (Vol. IV, p. 2. fol. 167, a).

lands of the guild of the Holy Cross, made October 5, 1530,<sup>8</sup> and now among the archives of Stratford; the last article of which is, *Redditus terrarum et tenementorum Magistri Thome Jolyffe*. The land which he bequeathed lay in the hamlet of Dodwell. The whole value of a close there, and of his tenements in the old town, and in Rother-street, amounted at that time only to £2. 17s. 6d.”<sup>9</sup> The schoolmasters of the grammar school, including Clergymen of Stratford (from 1546 to 1792), were as follows:

- 1546: William Dalam (not Dalum, as Dugdale has it). Benjamin Beddome was Master of the school also; the year is unknown, though likely after Dalam.<sup>10</sup>
- 1553: Mr. Roger Dyos. Appointed Vicar by Queen Mary.
- 1554: William Smart. Schoolmaster.
- 1560: Mr. John Bretchgirdle. Appointed Vicar by Elizabeth I, on February 27.
- 1563: William Allen. Schoolmaster.
- 1565: John Brownsworde. Schoolmaster.
- 1568: John Acton. Schoolmaster.
- 1569: Henry Heicraft. Appointed Vicar on January 1.
- 1570: Walter Roche. Schoolmaster.
- 1572: Thomas (or Simon) Hunt. Schoolmaster. (One of Shakespeare’s teachers?)
- 1577: Thomas Jenkins. Schoolmaster. (One of Shakespeare’s teachers?)
- 1580: John Cotton. Schoolmaster.
- 1583: Alexander Aspinall. Schoolmaster.
- 1584: Richard Barton. Appointed Vicar on February 17, by the Earl of Warwick.
- 1589: John Bramhall. Appointed Vicar on November 20.
- 1596: Richard Byfield. Appointed Vicar on January 23 by Mr. Edward Greville on the decease of John Bramhall.
- 1608?: Mr. John Rogers. Appointed Vicar.
- 1612: Edward Brooke (alias Willimore). Appointed Assistant Minister (April 29).
- 1614: Mr. Watts. Schoolmaster.

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<sup>8</sup> 22 Henry VIII.

<sup>9</sup> Plays & Poems of William Shakespeare (London: 1821), Vol. II, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Savage and Edgar I. Fripp, Minutes & Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-Upon-Avon & other Records 1553–1620 (Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1921), Vol. I.

- 1617: Thomas Wilson (preacher of Evesham). Appointed Vicar on May 5.
- 1624: John Trapp. Schoolmaster.
- 1640: Henry Twitchet. Appointed Vicar by Charles I.
- 1648: Alexander Beane. Appointed Vicar by Cromwell.
- 1662: John Ward. Appointed Vicar by Charles II.
- 1669: John Johnson. Schoolmaster.
- 1689: Thomas Willes. Schoolmaster.
- 1716: Gabriel Barrodale. Schoolmaster.
- 1735: Joseph Greene. Schoolmaster.
- 1772: David Davenport. Schoolmaster.
- 1774: James Davenport. Schoolmaster.
- 1792: John Whitmore. Schoolmaster.

Having established the preliminaries for a child to enter grammar school, we are told by biographers that young Shakespere did attend school in Stratford. However, that he would have to have been able to read by the age of seven is questionable, and it is questionable that his parents would have been able to send him to the Stratford or any other “Free-school” for that matter, unless they tutored him privately. We have no records of this private tutoring, or who the tutor was. Biographers are silent here. They hardly mention these preliminary qualifications needed to attend school. Shakespere’s parents could not write. Sir Edward M. Thompson, in his *Shakespeare’s England* (1916), writes: “Neither of the poet’s parents appears to have been able to write at all; they simply made their marks in execution of deeds.”<sup>11</sup> This is corroborated by Lee, in 1915: “When attesting documents he, [John Shakespere] like many of his educated neighbours, made his mark, [see Figure 1] and there is no unquestioned specimen of his handwriting in Stratford archives.”<sup>12</sup> Since the boy’s parents could not write, it only stands to logic neither could they read; so who taught young Shakespere to read so he attend school at the age of seven? His eldest sister Joan was born in 1558, and is presumed to have died at an early age, though we do not know when. His sister Margareta was born in 1562 and died the next year. Our Stratford lad was born in 1564 and three years later his brother Gilbert.

<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare’s England (1916), Vol. I, p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> A Life of William Shakespeare (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1916), p. 6.

It therefore stands that neither his sisters nor his brother (or his parents) taught young Shakespere to read by the age of seven to attend school. Regardless of this solid fact that was researched for this article, biographers tell us that young Shakespere, in 1571, the year in which Roger Ascham's *Schoolmaster* was published, had his name enrolled by the then master, Thomas Hunt, also curate of Luddington, as a pupil of the town's free grammar school. They offer no corroboration for this; they offer no records, and the conclusion is that their statement is false, and based purely on their own conceptions to blind the public, in order to give the Stratford lad a solid education. It is peculiar how Charles Knight's statement on the actor's education reads: "We *assume*, without any hesitation, that Shakespere did receive in every just sense of the word the education of a scholar; and as such education was to be had at his own door, we also *assume* that he was brought up at the Free Grammar school of his own town."<sup>13</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps relates to the hypothesis of the actor's father and his position that may lead us to assume how "Shakespere was certainly educated at the free-school at Stratford; for, even had we no direct evidence to that effect, when we consider his father's position in the corporation during his youth, we should most undoubtedly make the same assertion. Stratford had had the advantage of a free-school from a very early period, and Edward VI., in 1553 granted a Charter, in which it was ordered from thence forth to be called 'The Kings New School of Stratford-upon-Avon.'" This Charter gave reference to a grammar school founded upon older foundations by Edward VI, in 1547, (Charter 28 Jun. 7 Edw. VI) also noted by John Strype.<sup>14</sup> Still, we are not told how the Stratford boy was sneaked into the classroom, bypassing preliminary qualifications.

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<sup>13</sup> Shakspeare (London: Virtue & Co., 1869).

<sup>14</sup> Historical & Biographical Works (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1828), Vol. I.